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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SUVA 000549

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/07/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [FJ](#)
SUBJECT: FIJI UPDATE 12/7: "CLEAN UP" ATTEMPT CONTINUES, AS
DOES RESISTANCE

REF: A. SUVA 546
[B. SUVA 543](#)

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

[1](#). (C) Commodore Bainimarama and the RFMF's PM discussed elections via the media, leaving an impression they intend Fiji's democracy to adjust some, with an election date a way off. Both stressed their desire for an improved political environment. Bainimarama asked again for the international community to "understand," as his PM criticized the U.S. for Iraq. RFMF "clean up" efforts continue. Some government CEOs indicated they will stay on to help keep government functioning. Bainimarama installed new police leadership. Media indicated the transition was smooth; a senior police officer said it was "under duress." Letterhead for "President Bainimarama" is being used on termination notices. The RFMF council of advisors has been meeting and may include some civilian CEOs. NGOs, the Great Council of Chiefs, and presumably Qarase continue to gear up dissent, as RFMF intimidation efforts continue. We comment that, given the variety of factors and actors, no conclusive judgment can be made on whether Bainimarama's coup effort has yet succeeded. End summary.

Bainimarama on media, elections, int'l understanding

[2](#). (U) In a late p.m. media address, Commodore Bainimarama said the RFMF "did not totally gag the media." It just raised concerns regarding messages that can disturb the peace. Bainimarama confirmed that the head of the Elections Commission has been terminated. A successor will ready the machinery for a clean election. Bainimarama said he has been receiving "some" written applications for ministerial positions in an interim government. A newspaper ad will be out tomorrow. Bainimarama appealed for those who have "the welfare of the nation at heart" to come forward. He said he is appointing a team to look into Qarase Government corruption. He appealed again to the international community to "understand." He said "democracy is good for people but not to hide corruption or to divide the people."

RFMF's PM on Australia, NZ, U.S., China, and elections

[3](#). (C) The RFMF-appointed Prime Minister for Fiji, Jone Senilagakali, gave a radio interview on Dec. 7 in which he told New Zealand and Australia to "back off" for a month and leave Fiji to rebuild a government without corruption. He emphasized that he wants to help put in place a new system

that will bring prosperity and that will "remove hatred, especially the hatred toward Indians by the indigenous Fijians." He said, "Democracy might be all right for Australia and New Zealand but it is certainly not all right for Fiji, I can tell you that. I think in Fiji we need a different type of democracy. Just look at the United States - the father and mother of democracy. Look at what they have done in Iraq." Senilagakali suggested that Fiji's next election, under some different form of democracy, could be a couple of years away. He told Australian media that if Australia and New Zealand pull their aid, Fiji will ask the countries of Southeast Asia, China, and Taiwan to help. He said he is sure they will.

RFMF works at cleaning house

¶4. (U) The RFMF announced today that it has sacked Police Commissioner Hughes, Acting Police Commissioner Driver, Assistant Police Commissioner Bulamainaivalu, Public Service Commission (PSC) chair Huggett, PSC CEO Jale, Prime Minister's Office CEO Kotobalavu, and Solicitor General Nand. Per ref B, all of them had spoken out against the RFMF's illegal actions. Parliament Secretary General Mary Chapman has also been fired. A military spokesman said other Government CEOs and civil servants could lose their jobs as well if they oppose the military. Late in the day, Jale told the media the RFMF has asked all CEOs to prepare reports on how to keep the government functioning, and a meeting is to take place Monday to discuss plans. Kotobalavu appeared late in the day to say that he accepts the new PM will bring in a new CEO. Kotobalavu is going on leave. Environment Minister Bune (a Fiji Labor member of Qarase's multi-party cabinet) told the media today people should accept a coup and move on.

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Bune, who was in the Chaudhry Government deposed in 2000, seemed resigned to a repeat.

Police reconcile? or not?

¶5. (C) The RFMF's choice to be Police Commissioner, LtCol Jim Koroi, met with Acting Commissioner Driver and other senior police leaders in the morning. According to media reports, the police leadership then accepted Koroi as the new boss during a traditional Fijian ceremony, and as Driver departed, he graciously stated he is leaving the police "in good hands." A senior police officer has informed us that the entire scenario was acted out "under duress." Before Koroi arrived, the senior police leadership agreed that those not fired would stay on, since someone must lead the rank and file. There is concern that police might become tainted by orders to undertake illegal acts. The force has orders to report to senior leadership any concerns. Police at all levels are instructed to resign if necessary. We hear, confidentially, that Driver plans to depart Fiji Saturday,

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worried that "Bainimarama might have one of his mood swings" and come after him.

President Bainimarama...

¶6. (C) The Aussies have seen a copy of the notice Bainimarama sent to Police Commissioner Hughes, terminating his employment. The letterhead is in the name of "President Bainimarama." To date, the Commodore has not publicly used that title.

The Council of Advisors

¶7. (C) In Bainimarama's media statement declaring a takeover Tuesday evening, he said a council of advisors would assist him until the Great Council of Chiefs could re-appoint President Iloilo and set up an interim government. The council has reportedly met each morning since and seems to consist mostly of senior RFMF officers. While visiting RFMF

HQ this a.m., our DATT observed four or five civilians engaging with advisory council members and the RFMF-designated PM. One civilian was PSC Deputy Director for Operations Tom Lee, who said he "has to keep things running" or Fiji will be even worse off. He said government workers are nervous, and leadership needs to calm them. Another civilian was Foreign Affairs CEO Isikeli Matakaitoga, whom PM Qarase warned several diplomats not to deal with some weeks ago because Isikeli's allegiance to the Government was suspect. We are seeking a full list of council members.

New NGO coalition formed

¶8. (U) Nine NGOs and a number of prominent activists formed a broad-based new Coalition for Democracy and Peace yesterday, Dec. 6, to oppose Bainimarama's coup effort. They stress devotion to the Constitution, democracy, and the rule of law, announce they fully support the constitutionally elected government, and declare they do not accept the authority of the RFMF or any interim administration imposed on the people.

A resolution the group has distributed calls on the President to establish a Commission of Truth and Justice with a mandate to dig into the RFMF list of demands and make binding decisions.

Intimidation efforts continue

¶9. (U) RFMF intimidation efforts continue. Vice President Madraiwiwi reportedly has been booted out of his official residence and is looking for an apartment to rent. Our efforts to contact him today were unsuccessful. The Chair of the GCC strongly criticized such disrespect for a senior chief in remarks to the media, and said Madraiwiwi remains VP in the eyes of the appointing authority, the GCC. Several Qarase Ministers reportedly are continuing to show up for work, letting the media know they consider Bainimarama's termination announcement illegal. Some activists established a "shrine to democracy" a few days ago on the face of their home in the Suva suburb of Lami. They put up signs saying: yes democracy, no to guns," and framed Fiji flags. Yesterday evening, RFMF troops arrived and told the activists to have the shrine dismantled by 8 a.m. today. The activists have told the media they are not intimidated, and they intend to continue exercising their rights. In remarks today, Bainimarama acknowledged cautioning people who are trying to

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destabilize things on the "consequences" that can follow.

Comment

¶10. (C) Bainimarama and the RFMF are still endeavoring to bring the rest of Fiji on board for their coup effort. Replacing the Police senior leadership may help in that, depending on how the rest of the police force responds. Today's indications from a number of CEOs that they are prepared to stay on the job to keep government functioning also would appear to give Bainimarama an edge. However, PM Qarase, President Iloilo, the Great Council of Chiefs, many in the NGO/activist community, at least some in the civil service, and others have not bought in yet. This is Fiji and things sometimes take a while to work through. As of COB today, we still believe no conclusive judgment can be made that Bainimarama's coup effort has succeeded.

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